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US MISSION GENEVA FOR LABOR ATTACHE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: OMAN ISSUES ADDITIONAL LABOR REGULATIONS

REF: MUSCAT 1565

¶1. On November 6, 2006, Minister of Manpower Juma bin al-Juma signed Ministerial Decision 311/2006 regulating the formation and activities of unions. On the same day, the Minister issued a legally-enforceable administrative circular prohibiting employers from withholding workers' passports, which contacts claim affirms existing Omani legal practice. According to Omani officials, the Minister's actions fulfill two of Oman's final three obligations for labor reform under U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations (reftel). Post has received no information on the final commitment-clarifying compulsory labor provisions- which reportedly would require the Sultan to amend Oman's Basic Law through a Royal Decree.

¶2. Contacts at the Ministry of Manpower confirm that Ministerial Decisions become law one day after they are published in the official gazette, which the Ministry of Legal Affairs prepares twice monthly. Contacts state that they expect the next edition of the gazette on November 16, and that Ministerial Decision 311 should become law on November 17. The administrative circular, however, does not require publication to become legally enforceable, and has been in effect from the date of the Minister's signature. Contacts assured poleoff that Ministerial Decision 294/2006 covering collective bargaining (reftel), which Minister al-Juma signed on October 29, became effective after publication in the November 2 gazette. In addition, Royal Decree 112, which the Sultan signed on November 4, became law on the date of its signing.  
GRAPPO